United Nations E/CN.3/2004/9

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
23 December 2003

Original: English

Statistical Commission
Thirty-fifth session
2-5 March 2004
Item 3 (g) of the provisional agenda*
Demographic and social statistics: poverty statistics

Report of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-fourth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics. The Commission is requested to review the work programme of the Group.

* E/CN.3/2004/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 4* (E/2003/24), chap. I.A.

03-67666 (E) 150104

Report of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics

1. Purpose

The main objectives of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics are to harness the experience and concerns of different groups and organizations in the world that are working on the measurement, interpretation and use of poverty statistics, especially when such work is being done by or in close contact with statistical offices. The identification of the indicators, methodologies and statistical sources being used should allow the preparation of a document or reports containing the most up-to-date information on matters of poverty measurements, common procedures and best practices. At the same time, the most important difficulties could be identified and experts working with similar problems and topics could cooperate and thereby improve the quality and relevance of measurements. The experience obtained has allowed the Rio Group to start preparing a compendium of good practices.

2. Year organized

1996.

3. Participants

Countries

Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, Uruguay, United Kingdom, United States of America.

Agencies and other institutions

Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía, Economic Commission for Africa, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Statistical Office of the European Communities, Human Science Research Council, Inter-American Development Bank, International Labour Organization, United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning, London School of Economics and Political Science, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Paris 21, Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research, World Bank, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Statistics Division.

4. Meetings

First meeting, Santiago, 7-9 May 1997.

Second meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 13-15 May 1998.

Third meeting, Lisbon, 22-24 November 1999.

Fourth meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 15-17 October 2001.

Fifth meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 13-15 November 2002.

Sixth meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 12-14 November 2003.

5. Topics considered

Measurements oriented towards synthetic indicators or policy for poverty alleviation; analytical classifications of synthetic indicators of poverty statistics: absolute poverty (poverty lines and unmet basic needs approach), relative poverty, objective and subjective poverty; poverty dynamics; relations between poverty and other conceptual categories used in social policy, such as social exclusion, vulnerability and social rights; microlevel approach (household and individuals) to poverty measurements associated with policy for poverty alleviation, international comparisons, international strategies to alleviate poverty, their objectives, goals, and means of implementation, and strategies for the improvement of information. In all those topics, methodological and procedural issues more widely used within different measurements of poverty have been examined and compared. The Rio Group has identified: (a) the most important methodological and statistical challenges in which participants are working; (b) statistical sources, concepts and classifications used for poverty measurements; (c) work under way to improve the timeliness and quality of sources and estimates; (d) international experience to move towards common practices in the measurement of poverty; (e) institutional agreements towards the comparability of measurements in different regions; (f) use of poverty statistics in the monitoring of poverty alleviation policies at the international level (see also E/CN.3/2002/5).

6. Products

The agenda and documents of its meetings can be found on the web site of the Rio Group at www.ibge.gov.br/poverty. Papers and final reports of the first four meetings have been published by ECLAC, bibliographies of which can be accessed from the ECLAC publications web site at http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/default.asp?idioma=IN or http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/ (Spanish) under the documents codes LC/R.1814, LC/R.1960 and LC/R.1998.

7. Planned activities

The Rio Group has compiled a very significant quantity of documents that reflects the work finished and under way in the area of poverty statistics. At its fifth meeting, it agreed to start work towards the publication of a compendium of good practices. At its sixth meeting, following a standard presentation, participants produced papers on practices in the areas of absolute poverty lines, relative poverty lines, access to basic services and basic capital possession, and social exclusion, social deprivation, empowerment and other social and political dimensions associated with poverty. Due to its particular features, practices concerning health and childhood and their links with other approaches were considered separately. A non-written practice concerning subjective poverty was introduced. On cross-cutting topics, presentations were made that synthesize the experience of the Rio Group in poverty dynamics, international comparisons and information strategies. Therefore, a first stage towards the compendium is currently available. The report of the meeting will review schematically the state of work and documents are already available on the Rio Group web page. A very significant event for future activities is the decision of the United Nations Statistics Division to establish a work programme to assist policymakers and statisticians in countries to meet the growing demand for poverty statistics and related information by building up a system of poverty measurement which is responsive to national and international data needs. Since the

thirty-fourth session of the Statistical Commission, the Division has contacted the Rio Group and decisions have been made to coordinate the efforts of both bodies (see also E/CN.3/2004/8).

8. Expected future products (dates)

The Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatistica IBGE is responsible for the report of the meeting and the preparation of preliminary proposals for future work, in close cooperation with members of the Rio Group. The possibility of publishing the compendium, chapters of the compendium or a preliminary synthesis of different topics discussed by the Rio Group, if enough documentation is available, is being explored by IBGE. The possibility of a joint publication in collaboration with the United Nations Statistics Division project are also being explored. It is expected that IBGE will submit the results of its consultations to the Commission at its thirty-fifth session.

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